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OUR MARY ANN.

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"Why, Temple, what is the matter with you? Running over an old friend, and not speaking!" exclaimed Charley Dale, catching his old college chum by the hand.

"Oh, excuse me, Charley; I did not see you," George Temple said, returning the cordial greeting with evident pleasure.

Charley Dale, looking up into his friend's face, asked:

"What is it that is worrying you, old fellow? I don't like that expression you are wearing. Come, ease your mind, and heart too, if you can, by confiding in your old friend. Perhaps I can help you," Charley Dale said, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder, and looking at him in the same frank and fond way that he used to when they were boys together.

"Thank you, George. I will tell you, although most likely you will think I magnify my trouble. The case can be explained in a few words. My home, children and everything else are going to destruction as fast as possible. My wife is a hypochrondriac."

Again Charley grasped his friend's hand, saying:

"Magnify! No, indeed. *I* know just what that is to endure. I sympathize truly with you. I have gone through the same mill. But, thank God, that is all over now. You must arouse her in some way—"

"I have tried everything, and have despaired entirely," answered Temple sadly.

"No, you have not. I know you have never tried 'Our Mary Ann.'"

Temple looked inquiringly at Charley, who broke into a merry laugh; after which he said:

"I could not help laughing, George; but I won't attempt to explain about 'Our Mary Ann.' Come home with me to dinner. Do! Then Fan. will tell you all about her. I should spoil the story."

"Yes, I will come gladly. I am sick and tired of restaurants. I have been taking my dinner across the street for several weeks," answered Temple.

On their way Charley told his friend of

some of his own trials two years before.

"I dreaded to enter the house," he said. "Fan. I found for months either in bed or on the lounge, always with the same sad expression. In answer to my 'How are you now, love? Better, I hope,' came ever the same:

"'No, Charles. I shall never be better in this world.'

"I tried in every way to arouse her. All she talked about was dying; all she thought of was dying. Why, I declare to you, she even made her sister fix her clothes ready to robe her for the grave. Ugh! What a time I had!" Charley said, with a visible shiver.

By this time they had reached Charley's home. At the window, looking out, was a pretty, bright looking little woman, holding up a three-year-old boy to look for papa.

A smile from her, a shout from the boy, greeted Charley. When, a moment after, he introduced George Temple to his wife, the expression of surprise on his friend's face was so marked that Charley laughed out, saying:

"You cannot reconcile my wife's happy face with my story, can you?"

"It seems impossible," returned Temple, as he hung his hat on the rack, and followed Charley into the dining-room, where a very nice dinner awaited them.

Charley told his wife of his friend's trouble, and added:

"Fannie, will you tell George about 'Our Mary Ann?'"

"After we have finished. I do not want to spoil Mr. Temple's dinner," answered Fannie, with a very expressive little laugh, adding:

"But, Mr. Temple, I can give you hope for Mrs. Temple's recovery, if Mary Ann can be found to attend her, and I have no doubt she can."

Many times during dinner Mr. Temple would look at Fannie's bright face, and think nothing on earth would make him so happy as to see his wife looking as his friend's. And what magic could have worked such a wonderful change? he wanted to ask. Once she caught the expression, and said, with such a cheery voice, that Temple thought no wonder Charley looked so happy, with such sweet music ever sounding in his ears:

"Now, Mr. Temple, I see Charley has been telling tales out of school. And you are wondering and waiting for an explanation of the mystery? Well, come into the sitting-room, and I will tell you the story of 'My Mary Ann.' I think it better than the song."

Fannie rang the bell for little Charley's nurse, and resigning him to her care, began what Mr. Temple was so anxious to hear.

"I had been suffering with chills for many months, and when at last I did get rid of them, I was so reduced in strength, not only bodily but mentally, that I was a misery to myself and every one near me. I could not exert myself to do the most trifling thing. Although my physician assured me I only needed air, exercise, change of scene, and so on, I would not believe him. I thought I had disease of the heart in some terrible form, and so I made up my mind that I must die before long.

"In vain Charley tried to get me out. Sometimes, perhaps once in six weeks, I yielded. Of course the exertion tired me, and I would return vowing never to try it again. And so I grew weaker and weaker, until at last I remained up stairs, and saw no one but my most intimate friends. I believe Providence sent me Mary Ann at this time. A very few days after her entrance, she was left in full possession of the house. Our cook came informing me 'she was from one of the fust families, and was not gwine to be bossed by any poor white Virginny gal.'

"That same afternoon my young sister was with me, when we heard the hall bell. As several minutes passed, and Mary Ann came not to announce the visitor, or deliver any message, Olive went out to see what it meant. Some minutes, perhaps five more, elapsed, and Olive came neither. Then I exerted myself, and by the aid of the bannisters went slowly along to the first landing, where, to my great wonder, I found Olive, convulsed with laughter, down on the floor. A sign from her stopped my exclamation, and directed me. I peeped over the bannisters, to see Mary Ann. With a large carving knife in one hand, and a tea-cloth over her arm, she stood holding the door partially open with the other. In answer to something I had not caught, she said:

"'No, you can't see her. She's in a poor state of health. In fact we're prepared for her death 'most any hour. She don't see nobody much.'

"'Perhaps I might offer her some spiritual comfort,' was said in tones that sounded to me as coming from the tombs.

"'Spiritual comfort? I don't know what you mean by that; but she has the best of liquors. And if her husband can't comfort her, I don't think sich a looking pusson as you is likely to. You're kind a scary looking, to my eyes.'

"'My good woman, my calling should induce you to treat me with more respect. I am—'

"'Well, who invited you to call? I'd know better what to do if you'll tell me that,' Mary Ann snapped out.

"'You misunderstand me, my good woman. Allow me to come in while I explain. Then you can take my card to your lady,' spoke the dismal voice.

"'No, sir, I don't go and leave you. I don't praise myself by saying I'm good. And how do you know I'm a good woman? But I'll tell you that I'm honest, and kin be trusted; and you'll know that before you go. I had a friend'—Mary Ann always had a friend to refer to in any emergency—'that went up stairs and left just sich a looking pusson as you at the door. When she went for the lady, he went for the silver; and when she come down both was gone—silver and pusson with the long face too. You can't ketch me so. Now say what you come for? I've got my dinner to 'tend to,' snapped out Mary Ann.

"'I am raising funds for the poor heathen children of—'

"He was interrupted by Mary Ann exclaiming:

"'Oh, I know now. You say you're going to preach the gospel to folks in some foreign place. May be you are. But if you're in earnest about it, about preaching, you jest go down to Eastville, and you'll find folks as wants the gospel as bad there as anywhere. But if them Eastvillians don't like you they will raise too much fun for you. Them Jay boys down there—'

"Just then I heard the blinds slammed, and a voice gruff enough exclaim:

"'A perfect idiot!"

"And a moment after, the door closed on whatever more he might have said.

"When Charley came in, Olive related this conversation, and I joined his hearty laugh with the first smiles for many weeks. We afterward learned the man was an impostor, and were glad he had met his match.

"Olive went home that evening, and Mary Ann came up to keep me company. Charley returned earlier than usual, and drew his chair up to the bedside to try and amuse me with some news he had heard. Mary Ann sat still, although I made some excuses to get her out. During a pause in Charley's story she astonished us by asking:

"'Mr. Dale, do you know any nice young man that wants a nice young woman for his wife?'

"Charley looked at her a moment, and then asked very seriously:

"'Why, Mary Ann, do you know the nice young woman as wants the husband? Perhaps I might find her one.'

"'La, now, Mr. Dale. You know who I'm eluding to. I'm thinking about it myself,' she said, simpering.

"'It! That means the husband, I suppose?' said Charley. 'Very well, Mary Ann. I wonder that you have not married long ago. You are a pretty fine looking woman. I will keep a look-out in your behalf.'

"'Long ago!' she muttered, looking not so smiling as before. ''Tan't so *long* ago that I was old enough to think of sich things as husbands. But I could have married, if I had not been young and foolish, but I knows better now.’

“Mary Ann was at least forty-eight, I’m sure. I was tired of her talk, and made her go to bed, and was really provoked with Charley for seeming to enjoy her foolish talk.

“A few days after that, Olive was with me again. I was bluer than ever. She was putting away my furs and winter clothing.

“I spoke of never wearing them again, and expressed my wishes concerning the disposal of different articles. I had no idea of Mary Ann’s presence until she asked:

“ ‘Are you disposing of all your clothes, and every thing?’

“Neither Olive nor I gave her any reply; but she did not feel at all slighted, and went on to ask, in that simpering manner that really enraged me:

“ ‘Well, now, who are you going to leave your husband to? May be Miss Olive wants to have him herself?’

“I wish you could have seen Olive’s face. I thought she would fly at her. And Mary Ann must have had some such impression, for she held up her hand, saying:

“ ‘Don’t, Miss Olive. Indeed I didn’t mean no harm. Jest let me tell you. I had a friend who lived with jest sich a nice lady as Miss Dale, and the lady was sick, jest like Miss Dale, and she had jest sich a effectionit husband as Mr. Dale; and this lady knowed how sich a nice man couldn’t be contented alone in the world; so, before she died, she left her husband to my friend. La! don’t I wish I could meet with jest sich luck! And his name was Charles too. When this nice lady was dying, says she:

"'Charles, my dear—'

"Mary Ann's pathetic tones were cut short by Olive's catching her by the shoulders and pushing her out of the room, shutting and locking the door to keep her so.

"Almost every day brought forth something very ludicrous, or dreadfully aggravating. I did not want for excitement constantly.

"She had been with me two months, when our boy was born, and contrary to my expectations, I lived on. I convalesced slowly. When baby was two weeks old, I was propped up in the easy-chair, feeling only well enough to allow my nurse to go home for an hour or so. Olive I had sent out with some little commission. I was left to Mary Ann's care. She came in, and finding me quite alone with baby, said:

"'Dear me! Jest to think of everybody going off and leaving you! So miserable sick too!'

"There was a tone of sympathy in her words, and my eyes filled, as I said:

"'Yes, I am sick, and shall never be better, I know.'

"Dear, no, indeed. I jest come up to ask you if I could be spared to go to a friend's funeral. She was sick jest like you ; not a bit worse. Well, her friends left her, and, poor dear! when they come back she was gone.'

"'Dead?' I gasped.

"'Yes, clear dead. And that's jest the way they'll find you some one of these days.'

"'Go away! Go! go!' I cried. 'You will kill me right now.'

"'La, now, don't get excited! I jest come up to entertain you, seeing how you was left alone. La, you better let me stay,' she urged. With difficulty I got her out of the room. I told Charley about it, and insisted he should send her off. But no, he seemed anxious to keep her, and I cannot tell you the horrible ideas that came into my poor weak brain.

"Well, the crisis came when our babe was two months old. I was still in my room. Mary Ann occupied the entry chamber, to be near, if I needed her at night.

"She came in one afternoon, bringing a friend and asking if she might go out to do a little shopping. I gave her permission, and together they went to her room. I think it was to close the door that I went, and in time to hear the stranger say:

"'She looks *awful* delicate,' and I staid to hear Mary Ann's reply.

"'That's so. She is going fast, jest like Miss Brown, you know, Jane Martin's husband's first wife. La, Mag, wouldn't I be in luck if the same thing happened to me? You remember Jane lived there; was chambermaid. Mr. Dale is jest sich a affectionit kind of man, and I know he couldn't live alone in this world. And I say, Mag, don't you think he said once, right before her, that I was a fine looking woman! May be I can make them both like me well enough to have the same luck Jane Martin had. Any way, I'm trying. Poor dear! she an't got much strength left now—'

“I could stand it no longer. I darted out into the hall, pushed open her door, and catching her by the shoulders, cried:

“ ‘I've strength enough left to put you out of the house, and if I'm *going* to die, it won't be while *you* are here.'

“She was too surprised to make any resistance; but as she was going down stairs, she said:

“ ‘I won't worry you, poor dear! It is the strength of *death* upon you, I'm afeerd. I'll come back after it is all over, for the rest of my things, if I want to take 'em off.'

“From that day I grew stronger. I had to help myself until Charley came home, and have been doing so ever since, and really, I bless the day that brought me Mary Ann.”

“Where can I find her?” asked Mr. Temple, whose eyes were still full of laughter. “She will be more than all the wealth of earth to us now, I know.”

“I have seen her within a month. I will

find her, and feel sure she will like to come, with such a prospect of 'jest sich luck as Jane Martin had,'" Mrs. Dale said, in a merry, hopeful voice.

She did find her, and Our Mary Ann is now with the Temples. I met George a short time since, and there was a much happier expression on his face. When I saw the change, I felt that a corresponding one had taken place in his home. Since, I have seen Mrs. Dale, and heard from her that Mary Ann is working to our satisfaction, and she has no doubt, in a few more weeks, Mrs. Temple will have strength enough to put her out, and declare that she has had a "perfect cure."